

Psalm 34 Series Part 3

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[0 : 00] How adventurous are you? Are you willing to try something new, a new experience, or perhaps savor some new culinary concoction that you've never come across before? Maybe on holiday you're visiting another country and something is put before you that you've never tasted, and it's somewhat frightening to try what has been offered to you. We sometimes miss out because of our unwillingness to try or to taste something new. Some might say we're also spared some horrendous experiences by not doing that, but I think we miss out more than anything else. On the matter of eating food, I think we've all witnessed, maybe our own children at some stage, or we've heard a child convinced that he or she will not like the food that is on his plate and is deaf to the argument of mom or dad. You haven't even tasted it. You haven't even tried it yet, but there's no persuading the child. He is sure that this is something he is not going to enjoy.

Well, as we continue our study of Psalm 34, David begins the section that we'll be considering this evening, which is verses 8 to 10, with an invitation to taste, to discover the goodness of God. We read there in Psalm 34 these three verses, Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. Fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Now, before considering this invitation at the beginning of verse 8 and what follows in the three verses that we've read, let's just remind ourselves very briefly of the historical context. We've read verses that give us that insight, and so it's not necessary to do anything other than very fleetingly remind ourselves of the principal events in David's life leading up to his penning, this psalm.

David and Goliath and his great victory over Goliath. And of course, in the wake of that victory, the fame and the fortune and the prestige and the popularity that came with his slaying of Goliath.

We know also, perhaps, of greatest value, most appreciated by David was the manner in which this opened the door to a valued friendship with Jonathan. But then, soon after, and indeed directly related to his success and his popularity, there was the jealousy of King Saul. Saul was jealous of David, and this jealousy found violent and insane expression in his decision and desire and intention to kill David, and so be spared this competitor, no doubt, as he viewed David. Well, the story is familiar to us. And so David had to flee from Saul.

[4 : 07] And in his fleeing, there was this occasion that we've read of having fled to Gath, no less. Such was his desperation, it would seem, that he heads into the very heart of enemy territory. And there he is spared by this recourse to feigning insanity that we've read of. And that allowed him to flee once again. And he flees to the caves.

And he writes this psalm. We don't know if in the very caves where he was, or it would be perhaps bold to affirm that with absolute certainty, for we don't know. But certainly, this was the occasion. This was what was going on.

This was the predicament David was in when he writes this psalm. And as we made clear, perhaps on repeated occasions, last Sunday when we were considering this in the morning and evening, to have an appreciation of these circumstances does help us greatly to better understand the psalm and informs us in our study of it. And so I, at the risk of repeating myself, have once again given just that executive summary, as it were, of the circumstances.

So this is the man. This is the man. And these are the circumstances in which David covenants, as the psalm begins, to extol the Lord at all times. However desperate the circumstances, however fearful the horizon, he promises and he commits himself, I will extol the Lord at all times. His praise will always be on my lips.

And so this commitment carries such authority, given the circumstances in which he pronounces this commitment. This is the man who, as the psalm continues, celebrates the deliverance of God, even while he is still in flight, even while he has not yet been fully delivered from the hatred and the malevolent and violent intentions of King Saul, yet he is able to thank God for a measure of deliverance and no doubt in faith thank God for full deliverance that he is sure that he is sure will indeed come. And now, this same David would invite others to discover the goodness of his God.

[6 : 53] And so he continues in the psalm, and this is where we focus now our attention, in verse 8, taste and see that the Lord is good.

In these three verses, verses 8 to 10, we have two matters that we want to particularly highlight.

Depending on the manner in which we approach the verses, perhaps we could, not perhaps, I'm sure we could do it in other ways. But the manner in which we want to do it this evening is by highlighting two particular matters.

And the first one is this, that we have, in verse 8 particularly, an invitation to begin a relationship with God. Very particularly, I think, the idea behind the words, and we'll be thinking about them in a moment, it does have that feel of a beginning.

Taste and see that the Lord is good. An invitation to begin a relationship with God. An invitation extended to those who do not know God, who have not experienced God, who have not tasted as yet for themselves that the Lord is good.

[8 : 06] And so David, having tasted and having savored the goodness of God, would have others also know this God, would have others also begin to experience and to taste and to delight in his God.

So an invitation to begin a relationship with God there in verse 8. But then in verses 9 and 10, we have what we might describe as an exhortation or instruction on how to continue in that relationship with God.

Indeed, in verse 9, he explicitly addresses those who are saints, those who are part of God's family, those who have begun this relationship, who are part of his people, fear the Lord, you his saints.

He exhorts such, but he also, in these words, instructs us as to the manner in which we are to relate to our God, the manner in which we are to cultivate and develop that relationship with God.

So these two matters are going to occupy our attention this evening. And we begin with the invitation.

[9 : 23] An invitation to begin a relationship with God. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him.

As already suggested, the language of taste and see suggests discovery. But this tasting, this discovering, will ordinarily, we might say almost necessarily, involve prior elements that are also to be found in this verse.

First of all, it requires a recognition of our need, a recognition of our hunger, if you wish, to taste of God, a recognition of our emptiness without God.

This is found, I think, in what David goes on to say. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. Now, no one will take refuge in God if they consider themselves to be without need.

The man who seeks refuge is the man who recognizes his vulnerability, the man who recognizes his need, the man who recognizes that he requires of help and of refuge and of protection.

[10 : 42] The independent man, the man who says that, all is well with my soul, I'm fine, thank you. Well, he seeks refuge nowhere. But the man who is conscious, the woman who recognizes her need, is the one who seeks refuge, who seeks help, who seeks one who can meet that need, who seeks one who can satisfy that hunger.

And so, if we are to taste and see that God is good, we will only do so. There will only be a motivation to do so. There will only be a spur to do so in the measure that we are conscious of our need of God.

In the measure that we are conscious that we are indeed sinners in need of a Savior. In the measure that we are conscious that our sin has alienated us from God, that we are far from Him.

And in order that that friendship might be restored, we must turn to Him for help and forgiveness. So, if this relationship is to begin, if this invitation to taste and see is an invitation that is going to find echo in our soul, there must be that recognition of need, that hungering for that which as yet we have not experienced or discovered.

And this is a work of God's Spirit in our soul. But of course, it's not enough to recognize our need, but in recognizing our need, we must seek help.

[12 : 21] And this is precisely what David speaks of. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. Not only the man who is conscious that he needs help, not only the woman who recognizes the need for forgiveness, but the one who seeks that help, the one who seeks out that forgiveness, the one who takes refuge in God.

And in so doing, there is this discovery. In so doing, there is this tasting and discovering that the Lord is good, that the Lord does provide refuge, that the Lord does answer the cry of the needy sinner.

It is then that we taste. It is then that we see. It is then that we experience and discover that the Lord is good.

This language describing the Lord as good is language that is covenantal in nature and speaks of the good promises of God very particularly.

It speaks of a God who is true to His promises. It speaks of a God who is faithful in that which He offers. And so when we speak of tasting and discovering that the Lord is good, really what has been spoken is of those who take God at His word, who discover the promises of God, and who act upon those promises, and discover and taste and see that what He promises, He delivers.

[14 : 02] If He promises to help, then He will help. If He promises to lift up the downcast, He will lift them up. If He promises to forgive those who come confessing their sin, then He will be true to His promises.

If He promises to accept and to embrace those who have been rejected by others, then that promise will be kept.

Taste and see. Discover what the promises are and test God. Discover if they are true for yourself. Not because others have told you, not because you imagine that, well, I guess they must be true because God isn't going to be faithless in His promises, but discover for yourself.

Taste and see. Discover. Experience that the Lord is the good. The question might reasonably arise, well, how do I taste and see?

Where do I start? Well, if, as we are suggesting, this tasting and discovering that the Lord is good is focused very particularly on claiming, attesting of the promises of God, well, where do we find these promises?

[15 : 21] Where are we going to find what God offers to us? Well, we will find these things in His Word. It is to His Word that we must turn. It is there that we will discover what He offers, what He places on the table for sinners such as we are.

What great promises are to be discovered or to be discovered in the Word of God. There is where we must turn. It is there that we must taste and discover that these promises are true.

This language of tasting the goodness of God is found on other occasions in the Scriptures. We've sung in Psalm 119 of how the psalmist uses this picture, this language of tasting, of savoring the goodness of God.

But also particularly in relation to the Word of God, as indeed is the theme of Psalm 119, in the letter to the Hebrews and chapter 6 and verse 5, we read of those who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God.

Who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God. Now, for those of you familiar with the passage, you will be conscious that there are difficulties in that passage.

[16 : 46] But my concern is simply to focus on that particular language that is used to taste of the goodness of the Word of God. You want to discover for yourself.

You want to taste for yourself. Others have told you about this God. Others have told you about what it is to be a Christian, to become a Christian. And you're intrigued. You're curious. You want to know more.

Well, I would commend to you, turn to the Word of God. Read the Word of God. Discover in the Word of God the promises that God has for you.

And as you turn to the Word of God for yourself, ask God that He would speak to you, that He would make known to you your own condition, your own need, and that He would, together with that, demonstrate to you the generous provision that He makes for you.

It is in the Word of God that we discover what God has done for us. It is in the Word of God that you will discover who Jesus is and what Jesus has done.

[17 : 53] His death on the cross in the place of sinners. It is in the Word of God that you will discover time and time again the promises of God of forgiveness and new life to all who put their trust in Him.

Taste and see that the Lord is good. But you do have to taste. It's not enough to observe.

It's not enough even to admire. You have to taste. You have to bite the bullet, as it were, and discover for yourself. We've made reference to that passage in Hebrews of tasting of the goodness of the Word of God.

But there's another passage in the New Testament that I want to make just a passing reference to where this same language is used and which enriches a little how we are to understand this business of tasting of the goodness of God and what it implies and what it involves.

In 1 Peter 2, and verses 2 and 3, 1 Peter 2, and verses 2 and 3, we read as follows.

[19 : 13] Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Here, Peter is speaking to those who have already tasted. who have already discovered, who have already tested the promises of God and discovered them to be true and faithful.

And Peter says to them, now that you have tasted, continue, develop, cultivate that appetite for God and His Word. Do not rest content with what you have tasted.

However wonderful it may have been on that first occasion, you must develop your taste buds as it were. You must cultivate this spiritual appetite for God and His Word that you would grow and develop and become more and more useful in God's service.

So having tasted, we must continue and develop our appetite for God and His Word. What about you? Have you tasted and discovered that God is good?

[20 : 30] I cannot taste for you. Just like the father or the mother cannot eat that food on the plate for their child. The child must eat for himself or for herself if it is to be of any value.

So too, you must taste for yourself. You must discover for yourself. Others can wax lyrical about the portion that is before you.

Others can describe to the best of their ability but they will always fall short of what it is to taste for yourself.

So the psalmist invites us, invites all who would hear the invitation, taste and see that the Lord is good. Begin a relationship with God, a relationship that in the light of the New Testament we know is one that begins and can only begin as we put our trust in God's Son, Jesus Christ, and enjoy the forgiveness that is to be had for all who trust in Him.

But that which we begin we must continue. That is the import or the impression very clearly given in the brief passage that we read there in Peter's letter.

[21 : 55] You've tasted that God is good. Well, continue to taste. Continue to feed yourself on God and His Word. And in the psalm we have also this exhortation, this instruction as to how we will develop this relationship with God in verse 9.

Fear the Lord, you His saints. You who have tasted, you who have discovered, how will you relate to your God? How will this relationship that has begun be developed?

What is the manner in which it is to be developed? Well, fear the Lord. Fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing. In these two verses, verses 9 and 10, there are maybe two elements that we can notice.

First of all, it speaks of what we must do. We as Christians, as believers, as part of God's family, as those who by grace are in a relationship with God, what must we do?

But we also have what God promises to do for us. But what must we do? Well, it's very clearly set before us there in verse 9. Fear the Lord.

[23 : 11] Fear the Lord. This is a very comprehensive, perhaps the most fundamental and comprehensive term we have in the Scriptures to describe a true believing attitude to the Lord.

It is the devoted reverence of a trusting saint who fears the Lord. It speaks of a respect, of a reverence, of a submitting to God in a recognition of who He is, in a recognition of who we are.

It is not a terror before Him, as we well know, but it is that deep and profound respect for God. Fear the Lord, you His saints.

What does it look like? Well, this is a massive topic that we cannot do justice to. But perhaps some elements of a genuine fear of God that is a concern for His glory, much like we were considering this morning in Paul and Barnabas who were grieved to see that God was being denied the honor and the glory that is His Jew by the population at Lystra, and so they can do nothing less than rush into the crowd and exhort them that they would leave aside these worthless things and turn to the living and true God.

These were men who feared God, who were concerned for His glory and His honor. One who fears God is one who submits to His Word, one who recognizes that the Bible is indeed the Word of God, the inspired, infallible Word of God, and who submits to it.

[24 : 52] Come what may, even when we are uncomfortable with what it says to us, even when we are reluctant and find it very difficult to obey its commands, one who fears the Lord is one who submits to Him and to His Word.

To fear God is to experience and to develop, to cultivate, you might say, a growing repugnance for sin. We know that often we can live side by side often, all too comfortably with our own sin, and yet one who fears God cannot do so.

One who fears God is one whose great desire is to please God, to know the smile of God as we live lives that are pleasing to Him, and so much more could be said.

But if we are to continue in that relationship to God, this is what is required of us. Fear the Lord, you His saints.

But we have also here what God promises to do for those who fear Him. And what we have is a promise, an affirmation that God will provide for those who fear Him.

[26 : 15] Fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing. What do we make of this promise? We've made a great deal of how God is trustworthy and how His promises are true, and yet we read this, and if we think about it and consider it in isolation, I think it can only cause difficulties for us.

Fear the Lord, you His saints. Listen to what it says. For those who fear Him lack nothing. There is a historical difficulty, if you wish.

Remember the context. Remember where David is as he writes this psalm, possibly languishing in this cave. And David says, Fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing.

Well, David lacked everything. There were so many things he lacked as he penned these words, and yet he makes this seemingly outrageous claim. Those who fear the Lord lack nothing.

So there's a difficulty, even as we consider the original context, but there's a difficulty also, I think, in our own experience. This sounds wonderful.

[27 : 25] Fear the Lord, for those who fear Him lack nothing, but is that actually our experience? Is it true of us as Christians that we lack nothing? Well, verse 10 sheds further light on how we are to understand this promise.

The promise is true, but verse 10 helpfully clarifies, doesn't qualify, but clarifies the promise that is being made by God through the psalmist.

Verse 10, The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. Two things that we can notice here. First of all, the picture that he uses, the image that he uses of the lions, is a means to vividly confirm the promise of God's provision.

And it is a very powerful and a vivid image because if you can imagine of all the beasts of the field, can you imagine one that is unlikely to lack anything?

Surely it is the lion. The lion, the king of the beasts of the field, surely the lion will never lack anything. Its prowess in hunting, its strength, guarantees that there will always be food on the lion's plate.

[28 : 47] And yet David says, even if the lion possibly could lack food, unlikely as that scenario may seem, but let's just imagine that that might happen.

There might be circumstances in which a lion would lack a meal to eat. Well, even if that were to happen, David assures us, those who seek the Lord will lack no good thing.

So there is this vivid confirmation of the promise, but there is also, and this is really what we want to particularly note, there is this clarification of the promise. In verse 9, those who feed him lack nothing.

But then in verse 10, and of course, often these are ways in which the psalmist tells us the same truth in different language to enrich what is being said, and here he says, those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

They lack no good thing. There isn't here an absolute promise that we will have everything we want in the material realm or in any other realm you care to mention, but there is a promise that we will lack no good thing.

[30 : 00] Nothing that God would have us have. Nothing that is within the promises he makes. We've already been stressing that this tasting and discovering that God is good is to be experienced in the recognizing and the claiming of God's promises.

Well, all that he promises, he will provide. All that he would have for us as a loving heavenly father, he will provide for us.

This is not, if we can compare it to the grand promises of those who seek office at election time, this is not some empty election promise.

Vote for me and I'll give you everything you want. This is not some empty election promise of material affluence, but an assurance on the part of God of his permanent fatherly care.

we will lack no good thing. We will lack nothing that he would have us have and that he knows that we need. Now, the measure in which we will be able to honestly testify that this is our experience, that we are able to say, yes, that is true.

[31 : 25] That is my experience of God. I have never lacked any good thing. The measure in which we will be able to honestly make that claim will be directly related to the measure in which we fear him.

But it is those who fear the Lord who lack nothing. It is those who seek the Lord who lack no good thing and who are able to discern and to recognize what it is that God is generously providing and to be content with that which he chooses not to provide.

well, may this be your experience, Christian friend. May you who, by the grace of God, have begun a relationship with God, who have tasted and discovered that the Lord is good, may it be your experience that as you fear him, as you seek him, you might be able to testify with the psalmist that you lack no good thing.

The story is told, and I have no reason to doubt the authenticity of it, that Columba, when he died on Iona in the sixth century, was engaged in copying the Psalms.

This was what he was doing in his final days or weeks. And we're told that the final words that he copied before death overtook him were these words of Psalm 34 and verse 10.

[33 : 09] The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. And what more thrilling testimony can there be for a Christian to be able to finish his days and to affirm from his heart and sincerely this is true.

And this has been true of me and of my Lord's provision for me. May this be true for all of us that gathered here this evening. Let us pray.